Where Is God?

Suffering, the Present Moment, and the Ground That Does Not Intervene

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> *Without God, there is nothing to intervene in.*

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This essay examines the question Where is God? not as a rhetorical challenge to be deflected but as a structural inquiry to be answered with precision. It argues that the question, as commonly posed, rests on a mistaken assumption: that God's presence should be visible as intervention within events. Once that assumption is examined, a different answer becomes available. God is not an agent within events. God is the sustaining ground of the present moment in which events occur. Without that ground, there is no moment to intervene in — no event that could occur, no freedom that could be exercised, no suffering that could be named. The question of where God is cannot be answered from within the assumption it presupposes.. It must be answered from the structure of what the present moment is, and what it requires.

I. The Assumption Inside the Question

The question arrives at the worst possible moment — in the wreckage of a hospital, at the edge of a grave, in the silence after a disaster. Where is God? It is asked with clenched fists as often as with open hands, and it deserves something better than comfort that does not hold.

But before it can be answered honestly, the assumption it carries must be examined. The question Where is God? assumes that God's presence should appear as intervention — as the event that did not happen, the bullet that should have been stopped, the earthquake that should have been redirected. On this picture, God is a kind of supreme agent within the world, operating at a higher level of power than any human agent but operating in the same mode: acting within events, adjusting outcomes, preventing some and permitting others.

That assumption must be examined before the question can be answered. Because if God is not an agent within events but the sustaining ground of the present moment in which events occur, then the question has been looking in the wrong place entirely.

> *Without God, there is no moment to intervene in. The issue is not why God failed to act within events, but what makes events possible at all.*

II. What the Now Is

The argument that follows depends on a precise understanding of what the present moment is. This is not a psychological claim about how the present feels. It is an ontological claim about what the present is.

The Now is not a feeling. It is not a brief duration — a thin slice of time between past and future. A duration, however brief, has length. The Now has none. It is not a boundary in the ordinary sense, the way a wall separates two rooms.

The Now is the point of actualization: the place where potential becomes real. Before the Now, an event is possible. After the Now, it is past. At the Now, it crosses from what could be into what is. That crossing has no width. It happens at a point of zero thickness, continuously, without interruption.

This means the Now is not one moment among many. It is the condition that makes any moment possible at all. You cannot step outside the Now to observe it. Every memory is retrieved now. Every anticipation is formed now. Every act of consciousness, every decision, every breath occurs now. The Now is not where some events happen. It is the only mode of existence that is ever actual.

As established in the prior work Does Time Need Me, or Do I Need Time?, the Now is entirely dependent. It has no thickness, no reserves, no self-sustaining depth. It is the most fragile and most fundamental thing in existence. Everything actual depends on it. And it depends on something it cannot provide for itself.

> *The Now is where God and creature meet — not because God occupies a moment in time, but because God is what holds the moment open.*

III. What Sustains the Now

Every dependent thing points to something it depends on. The Now depends on matter for its content and on change for its structure. But what does the Now itself depend on for its existence?

This is not a question physics can answer from within itself. Physics describes what occurs within the Now — the succession of states, the movement of matter, the unfolding of causes and effects. It does not and cannot describe what holds the Now open as the condition in which that succession occurs. That is a structural question, not an empirical one.

Follow the chain of dependencies to its terminus and what is required is something that is not itself dependent — a non-derivative, self-sustaining being that grounds the present moment without itself requiring a present moment in which to exist. Not the first event in time, but the one in whom the entire structure of before and after is simultaneously held.

In the book of Exodus, when Moses asks for the name of God, the answer is not a proper noun. It is a grammatical statement: I AM WHO I AM. Not I was. Not I will be. I AM — pure, unqualified, self-sustaining present tense. It points toward precisely the structure the argument requires: a being who does not inhabit the Now but sustains the condition of its actuality. God is not the Now. God is what the Now depends on — the ground without which the condition of all actualization would cease.

God sustains the Now the way attention holds a thought: the moment the sustaining withdraws, the thought does not fall. It ceases. There is no falling, no delay, no transition. It simply is not. Remove the sustaining ground and there is no Now. No event. No moment in which anything could occur — including the suffering the question is asking about.

This is why the answer to Where is God? cannot be found by looking for an intervening agent within events. God is not within events in the way a cause is within its effect. God is prior to events in the way a condition is prior to what it makes possible.

> *God does not sustain the Now selectively — holding it open for good events and closing it for evil ones. God sustains it as the universal ground of all actualization. What crosses it is the work of freedom.*

IV. Good and Evil at the Same Crossing Point

Once the Now is understood as the universal ground of actualization rather than a selective filter, the question of how good and evil relate to one another within it becomes clearer.

Good and evil do not alternate. They do not take turns crossing the present moment, with God directing traffic between them, allowing one through and holding the other back.

They are simultaneous — not equal in value, but simultaneous in their availability at the point of action. The same Now that holds the surgeon's skill holds the infection's damage. The same moment that carries a child's laughter may carry an adult's cruelty. The Now does not belong to good events and then transfer itself to evil ones. It is the singular ground within which all actualization occurs — without hierarchy, without sequence, without selection.

You and I stand at the same crossing point. The Now that is available to me is available to you. The same moment in which I could turn toward God, I could commit a crime. The same moment in which you could extend mercy, you could withhold it. God does not ration the Now by moral standing. God holds it open for both of us simultaneously — not as indifference to evil, but as the only possible architecture of genuine freedom.

A Now that only opened for the righteous would not be freedom. It would be a performance of freedom in a world where only one outcome was ever actual. Genuine freedom requires that both directions be genuinely available at the crossing point. God sustains that availability. What each person does with it is theirs.

This does not make God a passive bystander. Sustaining the condition of freedom is not a small thing. It is the most fundamental act possible — the act without which no other act, good or evil, could occur. The question *Why does God allow evil?* misframes what is happening. God does not allow evil the way a guard allows a prisoner to pass. God sustains the ground in which the free choice between good and evil is real — which is the only ground on which love, as distinct from compulsion, is also real.

And this is where mercy appears, not as intervention within events, but as the unwavering sustaining of the same moment for all. The Now that is held open for the one who loves God is the same Now held open for the one who denies Him. The same crossing point in which a person may turn toward the good is the crossing point in which that good may be refused. God does not withdraw the moment from the one who offends Him. He sustains it. That sustaining is not indifference. It is mercy of a more difficult kind — the mercy that does not eliminate the possibility of rejection, because it is the same mercy that makes the possibility of return real.

To hold the Now open for both light and darkness is not to approve the darkness. It is to refuse to close the only place where darkness can be left behind. As Augustine of Hippo observed, God permits evil not because it is good, but because He can bring good from it. Mercy, in this sense, is not the interruption of the moment. It is the refusal to withdraw it.

V. The Cry from the Cross

There is a moment in the Gospels where the question Where is God? is asked not by a skeptic at a distance but from within the worst possible crossing point.

> *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? — Matthew 27:46*

These are the opening words of Psalm 22 — and a Jewish audience hearing them from the Cross would have known the entire Psalm was being invoked. Psalm 22 begins in desolation and moves through the complete experience of abandonment, mockery, and physical collapse. Then it turns: he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

Christ is not reporting abandonment. He is praying the full arc of human desolation toward divine faithfulness, from within the most complete experience of that desolation ever undergone. The experience of forsakenness is real; the sustaining ground is not withdrawn. And the distinction between those two things suggests precisely what the framework proposes: the Now was not suspended at Calvary. The Father did not intervene to remove the suffering, because to do so would have been to puppeteer the crossing point rather than sustain it. The Son traversed the worst possible interior — the full weight of human evil concentrated into a single event — and the Now held. The Resurrection is not the reversal of the Cross. It points toward what emerges from the other side of a complete traversal when the sustaining ground does not withdraw.

God sustains the moment of suffering. God does not author its contents. That distinction is the ground of the entire theodicy.

VI. Four Kinds of Suffering, Four Different Roots

Not all suffering is the same. To treat it as one undivided mass is the first mistake in any response to the question. There are four distinct kinds, each with a different root, each pointing back to the structural claim differently.

The first is suffering caused by evil. A man is robbed, a child is abused, a people is oppressed. This suffering has a face and a cause — it is the wound one free being inflicts on another. Evil of this kind is not a thing in itself. It is a privation — an absence of a good that ought to be present. A lie is not a new reality; it is truth deformed. Evil is always derivative. It requires a host of good to corrupt. And if evil is always derivative, it points beyond itself to an original order it is bending out of shape. The existence of genuine evil is not evidence against a sustaining ground. It points toward one — because deformation requires a standard from which something has departed.

The second is suffering as correction. The Book of Job offers something harder than consolation: blessed is the one whom God corrects. Suffering of this kind is ordered toward restoration rather than punishment. It has direction. It aims at something beyond the immediate pain. This does not make it painless. It suggests that it is not purposeless — which is a different and in some ways more important claim.

The third is the suffering of being conscious. Rubén Darío named it with a precision theology rarely matches: there is no greater pain than the pain of being alive, nor greater sorrow than conscious life. The body grows older. Strength gives way. A stone erodes without grief. We experience the same process as loss because we are not only matter — we are matter that knows it is matter. That awareness is not a punishment. It is the condition of everything we are. The price of consciousness is that natural process is perceived as personal loss. Removing the price would remove the consciousness.

The fourth is natural suffering within an unfinished creation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes creation as *in status viae* — on the way, not yet complete,

genuinely in process. The earthquake and the flood are creation doing what an unfinished creation does — completing geological and atmospheric processes that belong to a cosmos still arriving at its form. To demand that God continuously suspend these processes is not to ask for providence. It is to ask for a terrarium in which the laws of nature apply only when convenient.

> *None of these four kinds of suffering requires God as direct cause. All four occur within the Now that God sustains. The sustaining of the Now is not the authoring of its contents.*

VII. The Contingent Chain

Consider where most human beings actually place their stability. A man trusts his salary. His salary depends on his labor, which depends on his employer's solvency, which depends on consumer demand, which depends on markets, which depend on geopolitical conditions, which depend on other people's contingent choices. Pull any thread and the entire web trembles. It is not a foundation. It is a net suspended in mid-air, every node holding every other node, and nothing holding the net.

What is true of economic and social structures is true at a deeper level of reality: dependent things cannot sustain themselves. A chain of contingencies, however long, does not become a foundation by being extended. It can fail — not as a malfunction but as a structural inevitability.

The Now itself is dependent. It has no self-sustaining depth, no reserves from which it draws its own continuity. Follow the chain of dependencies to its terminus and what is required is something non-contingent — a self-sustaining ground that does not itself require a ground. Jesus says in Matthew 6:24: no one can serve two masters. This is not only a moral warning. It points toward what the structure of dependence requires. Nothing contingent can perform the function of an ultimate foundation. Mammon — the

entire suspended net of mutual dependencies — was not built to hold what we place on it. It was never capable of being what we needed it to be.

VIII. The Self-Refuting Objection

The question Where is God when terrible things happen is posed most forcefully by those who have simultaneously denied the possibility of a non-derivative self-sustaining being. This creates a structural problem that must be named.

The question borrows the concept of injustice. Innocent people ought not to suffer. Children ought not to be harmed. That ought presupposes a standard against which the actual event is being measured and found wanting. But that standard does not emerge from indifferent physical process. It does not rise from the cooling of lava or the movement of tectonic plates. Outrage at innocent suffering presupposes that innocent suffering ought not to be — and that ought points toward a ground of moral order that the objection is simultaneously denying.

Without the sustaining ground, there is no Now. Without the Now, there is no event. Without events, there is no suffering to name. Without a ground of moral order, there is no standard by which any suffering could be called unjust. The person who demands to know where God was is borrowing the furniture of a house whose existence they have rejected — and then asking why the landlord failed them.

This is not a dismissal of the grief behind the question. A person standing at a grave is not making a philosophical argument. Their grief is real and it deserves full respect. But when the question is pressed as a philosophical objection — as a reason to deny the sustaining ground — it refutes itself before it reaches its target. You cannot use the concept of injustice as a weapon against the only ground on which injustice is possible.

> *Without God, there is nothing to intervene in. The question assumes what it is trying to disprove.*

IX. Where Is God?

Here is the answer, stated once, plainly.

God is not an agent within events. God is the sustaining ground of the present moment in which events occur.

God does not intervene in the Now the way a cause intervenes in an effect, or a guard intervenes at a gate. God sustains the Now the way I AM sustains everything — not from within the sequence of events but as the condition without which no sequence could occur. Remove the sustaining ground and there is no Now to hold. No moment in which anything could be actual. No crossing point at which freedom could be exercised. No event in which love or evil or suffering or mercy could become real.

God sustains the Now for everyone simultaneously. The Now that holds you and me is the same Now. The moment in which mercy becomes actual is the same moment in which cruelty becomes actual. God does not hold the Now open for the righteous and close it for the wicked. God holds it open as the universal ground of all actualization — which is the only ground on which genuine freedom, and therefore genuine love, is possible.

The Book of Job does not end with an explanation. It ends with a presence. God does not answer Job's questions. God appears — and in the appearing, the questions are not dissolved but transformed. Not where is God but here is God.

Suffering is not the silence of God. It is what it sounds like when the Now is being held open for free beings who have not yet turned toward the one who holds it.

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> ***God is present as the sustaining ground of the Now in which every act — good or evil — becomes real.***

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Note on Sources and Method

This essay is the fourth in a sequence of works by Oscar Gaitan developing a broader topology of time, identity, and divine sustaining. The prior works — Does Time Need Me, or Do I Need Time?, Zero Returned, and The Infinite Interior — establish the ontological framework on which the present argument depends. The theological references —

Augustine, Aquinas, Job, the Gospel of John, the Psalms, Exodus — are not authorities cited to settle the argument but witnesses who have pressed closest to the same structural questions from within their own traditions. The argument stands or falls on its own structural coherence. Theological and philosophical references are cited as parallel witnesses, not as grounds of proof. Cross-domain analogies — where used — are offered as illustrations of structure, not as identity claims between domains.